

Mr. J. Netten Radcliffe on the proposed Site of a Fever Hospital
at Maidstone.

THE Board of Management of the West Kent General Hospital, situated at Maidstone, contemplate the erection of a detached building for the reception of cases of infectious diseases upon a plot of ground in rear of the hospital, the property of the Board. Doubts having been expressed whether houses in the immediate neighbourhood of the proposed site might not be exposed to the danger of infectious disease extending to them from the contiguity of such a building, and whether this would not be placed in dangerous proximity to public thoroughfares, the Local Board of Health requested the inspection, of which the results are here given. If the Local Board is satisfied that no danger is to be apprehended in these respects from the proposed position of the building it purposes to enter into an arrangement with the Board of Management of the General Hospital, for the reception of fever cases, at a charge to be defrayed by the Local Board.

The plot of ground in question, quadrangular in form, has public thoroughfares on the north and west sides; it is overlooked by dwelling-houses on the east side and on the west side, and at the south-east corner two blocks of building, each consisting of two very old and somewhat dilapidated cottages, encroach upon it. Between these two blocks passes the road which, at the present time, gives access to the plot. South of the plot stands the General Hospital; a small garden, and the two blocks of cottages referred to interposing between the back premises of the institution and the proposed site. North of the plot is open country. The entire space of ground in rear of the Hospital, the property of the Board of Management, measures, from the back of the main hospital building to the northern limit, 450 feet; from side to side, at the point where it is proposed to place the detached building, 195 feet; and it includes an area of about an acre and two-thirds.

The projected building, as at present designed, will contain two wards, each for four beds, with a room for isolating a case if necessary, nurses' rooms, kitchen, and offices. It will be erected in two stories, a four-bed ward being placed in each story. The distance from the building to the nearest inhabited house, the first of a row running at right angles to the plot of ground at the north-east corner, would be 68 feet; to the nearest public thoroughfare, 78 feet. The nearest houses on the east side of the plot of ground are about 125 feet distant from the site. The distances between the proposed site and the nearest dwelling-houses and thoroughfares very closely approximate, but are probably somewhat in excess of those which exist between the London Fever Hospital and the houses and thoroughfare which adjoin it. The latter, however, is much more closely shut in by dwelling-houses. There is no evidence to show that infectious disease has at any time extended from the wards of the London Fever Hospital,* with its 320 beds, to contiguous houses or to persons passing along the great thoroughfare extending in front of it; and it is to be inferred that no danger of such extension would arise from erecting a building for cases of infectious maladies on the site proposed in rear of the West Kent General Hospital.

Necessary conditions, to preclude the dissemination of infection from cases of infectious disease collected together, are (a) that there shall be proper means of conveying the sick to, and when necessary the convalescent from, the hospital; and, (b) that there shall be efficient means for the disinfection of clothing, bedding, and beds upon the premises. The Local Board is authorized (Sanitary Act, 1866, sections 23 and 24) to provide a carriage for the conveyance of infected persons, and proper means for disinfection. The approach to an infectious-disease hospital is also a question of moment in respect to the danger of dissemination. The present roadway to the site under

* The old hospitals for fever and small-pox, at King's Cross, were far more closely hemmed in by houses than the present fever hospital, yet no extension of disease from their wards to the neighbourhood is known ever to have occurred.

consideration, between two blocks of cottages, would, it is obvious, be inadmissible as an approach to the proposed detached wards of the General Hospital; and access is to be made to them from the thoroughfare, open to the country, which runs north of the plot. In the event of the detached wards being erected, it would in my opinion be necessary to clear away the two blocks of cottages referred to and the walls which shut in the back premises of the main building. The entire space between the latter and the detached wards might then be converted into a garden, only such barriers intervening as would serve to prevent needless intercourse between the attendants of the two buildings.

The designs for the proposed detached wards came only incidentally under my observation; but I think it proper to note that the cubic space allowed for each bed did not exceed 1,700 feet, with a superficial area of 125 feet. Not less than 2,000 feet cubic space should be given, with the amount of superficial space proposed. I think also that the arrangement for the offices should be reconsidered.

No facts were forthcoming at the time of the inspection which would enable me to judge exactly what amount of accommodation for cases of infectious disease would be sufficient for the needs of the town. No doubt there will be periods when, as held by the medical staff of the General Hospital, so little infectious disease will have to be provided for by the Local Authority and in a public institution, that the detached wards will be empty. But, on the other hand, when infectious disease is prevalent, as during outbreaks of scarlet-fever and measles, it seems to me certain that a provision of nine beds would not at all times meet the immediate exigencies of the outbreaks and enable the Local Authority to use isolation in such a way as to limit the extension of the epidemics among the population. Unless the provision for isolation is such as to permit of the earliest cases of an outbreak, when requisite, being weeded out at once, the prime object of the measure is unattained. It must be remembered, moreover, that two infectious diseases, *e.g.*, scarlet fever and small-pox, may happen to be epidemic in the town at one time; and that the two classes of patients cannot rightly be placed together in one ward.

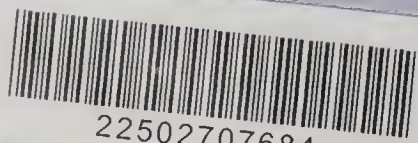
I am aware that the Board of Management of the General Hospital proposes to spend in the erection of detached wards the sum of 1,000*l.*, given to it by a generous benefactor for that purpose. The Board is exercising a very manifest duty in expending the money so as to obtain the greatest benefit from it. But as the Local Board of Health is desirous of co-operating with the Board of the General Hospital in carrying out the benefactor's designs, a wider question arises which particularly concerns the Local Board. It is for the latter to consider how far the proposed accommodation of nine beds for infectious diseases would enable it properly to carry out the duties relating to the isolation of such diseases imposed upon it by the Legislature in the Sanitary Act, 1866.

I am of opinion that in a town of 25,000 population there should always be means at the command of the Local Authority for isolating at least eighteen or twenty cases of infectious disease. I would urge, therefore, upon the Local Board of Health the importance of securing this amount of accommodation for cases of infectious disease, if practicable, in conjunction with the Board of Management of the General Hospital. The Local Board must remember, however, that it has authority to provide such accommodation independently. It may be remarked, in connection with this question, that small wards of the kind contemplated for the detached wards of the General Hospital are wasteful of nursing staff, and involve a very disproportionate cost of construction to wards of somewhat larger size. The nursing staff, nurses' living accommodation, kitchen requirements, and ward offices, needed for two wards containing four beds each, would equally meet the wants of the same number of wards with eight or ten beds each.

If a plan should be adopted of making larger provision for cases of infectious disease than that now contemplated by the Board of the General Hospital, it might then become a question whether this larger accommodation should be fixed upon the site proposed for the detached wards of the General Hospital. Although no danger to neighbouring dwelling-houses is to be apprehended from a hospital, of from eighteen to twenty beds, for infectious diseases, being erected on the site contemplated for the detached wards of the General Hospital, as a rule, a hospital for such maladies should stand well isolated in its own grounds, unless there are cogent reasons of cost and convenience to the contrary. I may add that in large and increasing towns the most jealous care ought to be exercised not to deprive General Hospitals of open spaces attached to them

Summary.

To summarize the conclusions to which I have come as the results of this inspection:—



1. No danger is to be apprehended by the extension of disease to contiguous dwelling-houses and thoroughfares from building detached wards for cases of infectious maladies on the site proposed in rear of the West Kent General Hospital.

2. A provision of nine beds will not meet the requirements of Maidstone in respect to the isolation of cases of infectious maladies, during epidemic outbreaks; and if a more adequate permanent provision for the wants of the town in this respect cannot now be made, the Local Board must be prepared to supplement the proposed accommodation when requisite.

3. The design for the detached wards of the General Hospital is defective in the capacity of the wards; and the arrangement of the offices should be reconsidered. The objection to the proposed site, as interfering with the open space attached to the General Hospital, would be diminished by demolishing the old cottages and fences which occupy a portion of the space, and throwing open the whole ground between the proposed building and the Hospital.

*Medical Department, Privy Council Office,
March 24, 1871.*

